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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of Administrative Appeals
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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FILE:

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Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER Date: APR 28 2010

IN RE:

Petitioner:

Beneficiary:

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Member of the Professions Holding an Advanced Degree or an Alien of Exceptional Ability Pursuant to Section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. Please refer to 8 C.F.R. § 103.5 for the specific requirements. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$585. Any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen, as required by 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i).

Perry Rhew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Nebraska Service Center, denied the employment-based immigrant visa petition. The matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a company which operates and controls bulk electrical power systems. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a senior network analyst pursuant to section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2). As required by statute a Form ETA 750, Application for Alien Employment Certification, approved by the Department of Labor (DOL), accompanied the petition. Upon reviewing the petition, the director determined that the beneficiary did not satisfy the minimum level of education necessary for classification as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree. Specifically, the director determined that the beneficiary did not possess at least a U.S. baccalaureate or foreign equivalent degree. The director denied the petition accordingly.

In pertinent part, section 203(b)(2) of the Act provides immigrant classification to members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent and whose services are sought by an employer in the United States. An advanced degree is a United States academic or professional degree or a foreign equivalent degree above the baccalaureate level. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). The regulation further states: “A United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree followed by at least five years of progressive experience in the specialty shall be considered the equivalent of a master’s degree. If a doctoral degree is customarily required by the specialty, the alien must have a United States doctorate or a foreign equivalent degree.” *Id.*

Section 203(b)(2) of the Act also includes aliens “who because of their exceptional ability in the sciences, arts or business, will substantially benefit prospectively the national economy, cultural or educational interests, or welfare of the United States.” The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2) defines “exceptional ability” as “a degree of expertise significantly above that ordinarily encountered.”

The beneficiary possesses a foreign three-year degree of “College Engineer” (Høgskoleingeniør) from Sør-Trøndelag College. Thus, the issue is whether this degree is a foreign degree equivalent to a U.S. baccalaureate degree.

As noted above, the Form ETA 750 in this matter is certified by the DOL. The DOL’s role is limited to determining whether there are sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified and available and whether the employment of the alien will adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed. Section 212(a)(5)(A)(i) of the Act; 20 C.F.R. § 656.1(a).

It is significant that none of the above inquiries assigned to the DOL, or the remaining regulations implementing these duties under 20 C.F.R. § 656, involve a determination as to whether or not the alien is qualified for a specific immigrant classification or even the job offered. This fact has not gone unnoticed by federal circuit courts. See *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F. 2d 1305, 1309 (9th Cir. 1984); *Madany v. Smith*, 696 F.2d 1008, 1012-1013 (D.C. Cir. 1983).

The petitioner initially submitted two evaluations of the beneficiary's educational qualifications. One evaluation is from [REDACTED]. The evaluation states that the beneficiary's three-year College Engineer degree is equivalent to three years of undergraduate study at a regionally accredited institution of higher education in the United States. The second evaluation is from [REDACTED] and it states that the beneficiary's three-year College Engineer degree is equivalent to a United States bachelor's degree.

On April 11, 2007, the director issued a Request for Evidence (RFE) requesting evidence that the beneficiary had obtained a bachelor's degree in computer engineering or a related field prior to the priority date. In response, the petitioner submitted an evaluation of the beneficiary's College Engineer degree from [REDACTED]. The evaluation states that the beneficiary's College Engineer degree is equivalent to a four-year Bachelor of Science degree in computer engineering from an accredited U.S. college or university.

The director denied the petition on August 9, 2007. On appeal, counsel has submitted a course-by-course evaluation prepared by [REDACTED]. This evaluation concludes that the beneficiary "earned the equivalent of a 2.54 grade point average and 132 credit hours, surpassing the typical 128-credit hour requirement for the award of a U.S. bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering, or a related Engineering discipline."

The evaluations of the beneficiary's credentials are inconsistent. As noted above, the evaluation from [REDACTED] concludes that the beneficiary's degree is equivalent to only three years of undergraduate study, whereas the evaluations from [REDACTED] state that the beneficiary's degree is equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree. The submission of inconsistent evidence precludes approval unless those inconsistencies are overcome with objective credible evidence. More specifically, it is incumbent on the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence, and attempts to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies, absent competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth, in fact, lies, will not suffice. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-592 (BIA 1988). The petitioner has failed to submit any evidence to resolve these inconsistencies.

Further, the WES evaluation fails to provide any explanation as to how it evaluated the beneficiary's degree, what materials were relied on, or what methodology was used in evaluating the beneficiary's degree.

The course-by-course evaluation from [REDACTED] lists all of the courses taken by the beneficiary during his three-year program at Sør-Trøndelag College, as well as the credits and "U.S. credit equivalent" for each course. The record also contains a copy of the beneficiary's transcript from Sør-Trøndelag College which lists the credits for each course completed by the beneficiary, and lists the total of 62 credits. In the course-by-course evaluation prepared by The Trustforte Corporation, the credit for each course taken by the beneficiary is increased by a factor of 1.65, increasing the total credits for the three-year program to 102.3. However, no explanation is provided as to why such an increase in the number of credits is appropriate. In addition, the Trustforte evaluation lists an additional 30 credits for "preliminary post-secondary studies," thus bringing the beneficiary's total credits to 132. However, there is no documentation in the record regarding any

“preliminary post-secondary studies” completed by the beneficiary. Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).

USCIS may, in its discretion, use as advisory opinions statements submitted as expert testimony. However, where an opinion is not in accord with other information or is in any way questionable, the Service is not required to accept or may give less weight to that evidence. *Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791 (Comm. 1988); *Matter of Sea, Inc.*, 19 I&N Dec. 817 (Comm. 1988). In this case, given the unresolved inconsistencies between the evaluations and the lack of support for the evaluations, this office finds that the evaluations in the record fail to establish that the beneficiary possesses the equivalent of a United States bachelor’s degree.

A United States baccalaureate degree is generally found to require four years of education. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. 244 (Reg’l. Comm’r. 1977). This decision involved a petition filed under 8 U.S.C. §1153(a)(3) as amended in 1976. At that time, this section provided:

Visas shall next be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions

The Act added section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. §1153(b)(2)(A), which provides:

Visas shall be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent

Significantly, the statutory language used prior to *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. at 244, is identical to the statutory language used subsequent to that decision but for the requirement that the immigrant hold an advanced degree or its equivalent. The Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, published as part of the House of Representatives Conference Report on the Act, provides that “[in] considering equivalency in category 2 advanced degrees, it is anticipated that the alien must have a bachelor’s degree with at least five years progressive experience in the professions.” H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 955, 101st Cong., 2nd Sess. 1990, 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N. 6784, 1990 WL 201613 at *6786 (Oct. 26, 1990).

At the time of enactment of section 203(b)(2) of the Act in 1990, it had been almost thirteen years since *Matter of Shah* was issued. Congress is presumed to have intended a four-year degree when it stated that an alien “must have a bachelor’s degree” when considering equivalency for second preference immigrant visas. We must assume that Congress was aware of the agency’s previous treatment of a “bachelor’s degree” under the Act when the new classification was enacted and did not intend to alter the agency’s interpretation of that term. See *Lorillard v. Pons*, 434 U.S. 575, 580-81 (1978) (Congress is presumed to be aware of administrative and judicial interpretations where it adopts a new law incorporating sections of a prior law). See also 56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991) (an alien must have at least a bachelor’s degree).

In 1991, when the final rule for 8 C.F.R. § 204.5 was published in the Federal Register, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (the Service), responded to criticism that the regulation required an alien to have a bachelor's degree as a minimum and that the regulation did not allow for the substitution of experience for education. After reviewing section 121 of the Immigration Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-649 (1990), and the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, the Service specifically noted that both the Act and the legislative history indicate that an alien must have at least a bachelor's degree:

The Act states that, in order to qualify under the second classification, alien members of the professions must hold "advanced degrees or their equivalent." As the legislative history . . . indicates, the equivalent of an advanced degree is "a bachelor's degree with at least five years progressive experience in the professions." Because neither the Act nor its legislative history indicates that bachelor's or advanced degrees must be United States degrees, the Service will recognize foreign equivalent degrees. But both the Act and its legislative history make clear that, in order to qualify as a professional under the third classification or to have experience equating to an advanced degree under the second, *an alien must have at least a bachelor's degree.*

56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991) (emphasis added).

There is no provision in the statute or the regulations that would allow a beneficiary to qualify under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree with anything less than a full baccalaureate degree. More specifically, a three-year bachelor's degree will not be considered to be the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. at 245. Where the analysis of the beneficiary's credentials relies on work experience alone or a combination of multiple lesser degrees, the result is the "equivalent" of a bachelor's degree rather than a "foreign equivalent degree."¹ In order to have experience and education equating to an advanced degree under section 203(b)(2) of the Act, the beneficiary must have a single degree that is the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). As explained in the preamble to the final rule, persons who claim to qualify for an immigrant visa by virtue of education or experience equating to a bachelor's degree may qualify for a visa pursuant to section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Act as a skilled worker with more than two years of training and experience. 56 Fed. Reg. at 60900.

For this classification, advanced degree professional, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(i)(B) requires the submission of an "official academic record showing that the alien has a United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent *degree*." (Emphasis added.) For classification as a member of the professions, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(C) requires the submission of "an official college or university record showing the date the baccalaureate degree was awarded and the area of concentration of study." We cannot conclude that the evidence required to demonstrate

¹ Compare 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5) (defining for purposes of a nonimmigrant visa classification, the "equivalence to completion of a college degree" as including, in certain cases, a specific combination of education and experience). The regulations pertaining to the immigrant classification sought in this matter do not contain similar language.

that an alien is an advanced degree professional is any less than the evidence required to show that the alien is a professional. To do so would undermine the congressionally mandated classification scheme by allowing a lesser evidentiary standard for the more restrictive visa classification. Moreover, the commentary accompanying the proposed advanced degree professional regulation specifically states that a “baccalaureate means a bachelor’s degree received *from a college or university*, or an equivalent *degree*.” (Emphasis added.) 56 Fed. Reg. 30703, 30306 (July 5, 1991). Compare 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(ii)(A) (relating to aliens of exceptional ability requiring the submission of “an official academic record showing that the alien has a degree, *diploma, certificate or similar award* from a college, university, *school or other institution of learning* relating to the area of exceptional ability”)(Emphasis added.)

Because the petitioner has failed to establish that the beneficiary has a “United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree” from a college or university, this office finds that the beneficiary does not qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as he does not have the minimum level of education required for the equivalent of an advanced degree.

The beneficiary does not qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as he does not have the minimum level of education required for the equivalent of an advanced degree.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not met that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.